

Environmental Public Health Tracking

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We seek to identify and prevent health conditions that may be caused by peoples' interactions with and exposures to their environment. We seek to bridge the gap between public health and the environment through linked data, education, and collaboration.

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CDC's New Strategic Plan for the National EPHT Network

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently released *CDC's Strategy for the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program, Fiscal Years 2005-2010*, which provides the framework of objectives for EPHT programs over the next 5 years. The following are the mission, vision, and goals as listed in the document's Executive Summary.

Vision: Healthy Informed Communities

Translating environmental and public health data into meaningful information leads to increased knowledge; applying that knowledge leads to actions that result in healthy communities.

Mission: To provide information from a nationwide network of integrated health and environmental data that drives actions to improve the health of communities.

Goal 1:

Build a Sustainable National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network.

Goal 2:

Enhance Environmental Public Health Tracking Workforce and Infrastructure.

Goal 3:

Disseminate Information to Guide Policy, Practice, and Other Actions to Improve the Nation's Health.

Goal 4:

Advance Environmental Public Health Science and Research.

Goal 5:

Foster Collaboration Among Health and Environmental Organizations.

To read the CDC Strategic Plan, visit
www.cdc.gov/nceh/tracking/epht_strategy.pdf



EPHT Strategic Planning Session, February 24 & 25, 2005

In late February, the Montana EPHT Advisory Group held its own Strategic Planning Session at the Great Northern Hotel in Helena. Over 35 Advisory Group members and invited stakeholders attended the 2-day session to prioritize health and environmental concerns and to plan for the next EPHT funding cycle.

Selma Abinader led the group through the two days of intense, thoughtful discussion on the future of Montana EPHT. Selma has worked extensively with the California EPHT project, and her experience was key in completing the Strategic Plan.

The information gathered from Montana stakeholders, EH assessments done by the 11 community sites, and statewide surveys of public health workers was compiled and used to

determine priority health and environmental concerns. The group voted on these and came up with a list of 5 environmental areas and 5 health issues to concentrate on. (See lists at right.)

The group also determined outcomes, action steps, and timelines for five focus areas of the EPHT project. This information is essential in directing our work and establishing short and long-term goals for the next 10 years.

Guiding principles and a vision statement were drafted. The guiding principles and vision were reviewed at the May Advisory Group meeting.

The EPHT staff would like to thank all the participants for their hard work and great input! Please check the EPHT website for final documents and more information.

Vision:

"We seek to identify and prevent health conditions that may be caused by peoples' interactions with and exposures to their environment. We seek to bridge the gap between public health and the environment through linked data, education, and collaboration."

Five Areas of EPHT Action

1. IT/Technical
2. Outreach & Education
3. Advocacy/EJ
4. Policy & Legislation
5. Partnerships/Collaboration

Priority Health Effects

1. Cancer
2. Respiratory/Lung Disease
3. Birth Defects
4. Asthma
5. Cardiovascular Disease

Pictured, l-r: Diana Hammer (EPA-MT), Selma Abinader (facilitator), Rod Gaither (IHS).

Priority Environmental Concerns

1. Air Quality
(Outdoor air pollutants (SO₂, CO, vehicle emissions), indoor air pollutants, second-hand smoke, forest fires)
2. Water
(Drinking water/ groundwater quality, surface water quality, quantity/drought)
3. Heavy Metals
(lead, mercury, arsenic)
4. Pesticides
(includes herbicides and pesticides)
5. Growth & Development Issues
(Urbanization, sprawl, cars/air pollution, septic systems contaminating water (elevated nitrates))



Biomonitoring and the Assessment of Arsenic in Drinking Water

Lou Olcott and Dr. Kammy Johnson, DPHHS Biomonitoring Project

Biomonitoring assesses human exposures to natural and synthetic contaminants by sampling and analyzing a

person's tissues and fluids. Blood and urine are most commonly analyzed; however, breast milk, hair, nails, fat, bone and other tissues can be sampled.

Biomonitoring is a rapidly developing field and has a relatively short history in the state of Montana. The Rocky Mountain Biomonitoring Consortium was started three years ago as a group of six states; Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and Montana,

utilizing a planning and laboratory capacity building CDC grant. The states are now prepared and funded to work on projects both collectively and individually.

Environmental Public Health Tracking and the Montana Biomonitoring Program have joined forces to make up the Heavy Metals Working Group with several other partners: USGS, Bureau of Mines, ATSDR, NRIS, DEQ and others. The

Working Group will lend expertise to planned biomonitoring activities such as sampling and testing various sites around the state for arsenic and other heavy metals in drinking water (private and public supplies) and test urine from people drinking that water for the same compounds. Sample collection and analysis will begin in summer of 2005.

For more information, contact Lou Olcott (406-444-9777) or Kammy Johnson (406-444-7453).



Dawson, Hill, and Yellowstone Counties Take Action on Environmental Health Concerns

Christine Deveny, EPHT Technical Facilitator

Eleven county and tribal based health departments completed community-level environmental health assessments within their jurisdictions in 2004. With input from citizen advisory groups and boards of health, they surveyed residents, identified the priority environmental health issues of concern, and generated a list of local action steps to help address those concerns. In March, EPHT selected health departments from Dawson, Hill, and Yellowstone Counties to receive a small amount of Special Project funding to implement some of these local action steps. September 30, 2005 is the completion date for all projects.

Dawson County's assessment project identified water quality as a priority environmental health concern. Health department staff and health board members chose to address this concern through increased public education. After obtaining input from the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology's Groundwater Information Center, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, and MSU Extension Water Quality Program, health

department staff provided well water testing for about 65 county residents. They distributed sample collection bottles at a health fair held in Glendive, coordinated the analytical work through Energy Laboratories, and followed-up with well owners as needed. The water samples were tested for sodium, fluoride, nitrates, and coliform bacteria. Participants received educational materials about the importance of protecting their wells from contamination and the need for periodic sampling and testing to assure safe quality. Local staff will map the analytical results. This will provide some initial baseline water quality data on which Dawson County can build.

Formed when initiating the assessment project, the Hill County Environmental Health Team is continuing its work. Team members and local experts are giving informational presentations about cancer rates, drug and alcohol abuse, and water quality issues at various community events. Local staff received computer training that will enable them to map

county-wide public and environmental health data. These were the action steps recommended by the team to address the priority concerns identified through their environmental health assessment. The health department is also working with local schools and daycare centers to determine environmental health risks that may exist in these facilities. For this work, they are using *Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Action Kits* and guidelines provided by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The Yellowstone County Board of Health selected food safety as their priority environmental health concern. The Health Department is forming a Food Safety Advisory Group to help obtain broad-spectrum community input into issues relating to food handling and safety throughout the county. Representatives from retail food service, grocery stores, caterers, schools, distributors, manufacturers, the Montana Restaurant Association, county extension service, and state/local regulatory agencies will be involved. Use of the advisory

group will lead to improved communication and rapport among regulators, the regulated community, and consumers. Additionally, this effort could help build support for future food safety initiatives the county might consider.

Yellowstone County is also modifying their electronic record keeping system and database to improve their foodborne illness surveillance system. Their goal is to meet the recommendations of the Food and Drug Administration's Voluntary National Retail Food Regulatory Program Standards as they relate to investigation and response. Another important aspect of this project is establishing a link to the county's communicable disease reporting system.

Numerous benefits are associated with these local projects. Not only are some local concerns being addressed, but citizens are also observing their public health departments working proactively to respond to citizen input. Public knowledge and awareness about environmental health issues is increasing. Health department staff are gaining technical skills, and building their capacity to work positively with community groups and citizens. These benefits demonstrate that EPHT is helping local health departments provide their citizens with some of the essential environmental health services recommended by public and environmental health leaders across the U.S.

Children's Environmental Health Summit to be held in Helena

Montana's Interagency Children's Environmental Health Network (CEH) is excited to host this year's Region 8 Children's Environmental Health Summit on August 3 and 4 in Helena at the Great Northern Hotel. The Summit is sponsored by EPA Region 8, the Rocky Mountain Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unity (PEHSU), and the MT Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Confirmed speakers include Dr. Henry Falk of NCEH/ATSDR and Dr. Katherine Shea from Chapel Hill. The summit will focus on prenatal exposures, early childhood exposures, and school environment exposures.

For more information, visit www.epa.gov/Region8/humanhealth/children or call (800) 433-8773.



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Upcoming Events & Activities

MT Public Health
Summer Institute
June 6-10, 2005
Bozeman, MT
(Marjean Heisler
Magraw and Chris
Deveny will be teaching
part of a class)

Region 8 Children's
Environmental Health
Summit
August 3 & 4, 2005
Helena, MT

MEHA Conference
September 5-7, 2005
Bozeman, MT

MPHA Conference,
September 13-15, 2005
West Yellowstone, MT

The Interns are Coming!

The EPHT project is excited to welcome three interns to Montana this summer! Mosey Hardin, Laurie Helzer, and Steven Onufrak will be joining us this summer and fall to work on Environmental Justice, Maternal and Child Health, and Biomonitoring, respectively.

Mosey is currently studying at the University of California Santa Cruz for her undergraduate degree in community studies with an emphasis in public health. She will be looking at environmental justice issues in Montana and will be following up with advocacy groups on the statewide surveys done last year by Dr. Wade Hill.

Laurie Helzer is completing her Master's of Public Health in international health this spring at Emory University. Laurie has a background in reproductive health, as well as experience with migration issues. Laurie is already familiar with the Montana Department of Health & Human Services. In the summer of 2004, she was an intern with Maternal and Child Health.

Stephen Onufrak will work with Dr. Kammy Johnson and Lou Olcott on the DPHHS Biomonitoring project. Stephen has a BS in Biology, an MPH in Epidemiology, and is working on his PhD in Epidemiology at Emory University.

We are looking forward to working with Mosey, Laurie, and Stephen!

